

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 6052

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, VN UR US VS

SUBJ: POSSIBLE SOVIET FEELER FOR MEDIATION ROLE IN VIETNAM

1. SUMMARY. EARLY THIS WEEK--BEFORE THE FALL OF SAIGON--A HIGH-RANKING NOVOSTI OFFICIAL INDICATED TO A U.S. NEWSMAN THAT USSR "GOOD OFFICES" SHOULD BE USED IN RECONCILIATION EFFORTS IN INDOCHINA. WHILE THIS OVERTURE WAS OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO SOFTEN ANY BACKLASH IN THE U.S. REGARDING SOVIET MILITARY AND POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR HANOI, IT SEEMS POSSIBLE THAT MOSCOW MAY INDEED SEEK A GO-BETWEEN ROLE IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD. SUCH A ROLE, HOWEVER, WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE LIMITED TO WHAT HANOI FOUND ACCEPTABLE. END SUMMARY.

2. LONGTIME MOSCOW CORRESPONDENT EDMUND STEVENS (NEWSDAY, LONDON TIMES) HAS INFORMED US THAT HE WAS APPROACHED APRIL 28 BY SENIOR OFFICIAL OF NOVOSTI PRESS AGENCY WITH WHOM HE HAS OCCASIONAL PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTACTS. SOVIET OFFICIAL STATED THAT HE HAD "IMPORTANT STORY" FOR HIM, THEN PROCEEDED TO DELIVER MESSAGE AS IF IT WERE AN OFFICIAL DEMARCHE.

3. SOVIET OFFICIAL'S PITCH WAS AS FOLLOWS:

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(A) SOVIET GOVERNMENT SINCERELY DESIRES TO

CONTINUE IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH U.S. AND IS CONCERNED THAT RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA MAY HAMPER THIS PROCESS.

(B) SOVIET GOVERNMENT CONSIDERS THAT SOME ACCUSATIONS VOICED IN U.S. REGARDING ITS ROLE IN INDOCHINA EVENTS ARE UNFAIR. SOVIETS HAD VIEWED PARIS ACCORDS AS PROVIDING U.S. WITH FRAMEWORK IN WHICH POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN VIETNAM COULD BE ACHIEVED, AND REGRETS THAT PERIOD FOLLOWING CEASEFIRE WAS NOT UTILIZED TO PRODUCE SETTLEMENT ACCEPTABLE TO PARTIES IN THE AREA. ON THEIR PART, SOVIETS HAD REDUCED SUPPLY OF ARMS TO NORTH VIETNAM AND HAS MAINTAINED RELATIONS WITH LON NOL REGIME IN CAMBODIA UP TO LAST MINUTE DESPITE CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE ON THEM.

(C) NOW, HOWEVER, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE INFLUENCE OF THE DRV WILL BECOME DOMINANT IN THE AREA. THE U.S. WILL HAVE TO LIVE WITH THE FACT AND DEAL WITH HANOI SOONER OR LATER.

(D) FOR THE FUTURE, THE MAIN TASK AT HAND IS TO MOVE TO ELIMINATE THE HOSTILITIES AND ANTAGONISMS WHICH HAVE DEVELOPED DURING YEARS OF STRIFE IN THE AREA.

(E) THIS PROCESS COULD BE HELPED IF THE GOOD OFFICES (DOBRYE USLUGI) OF THE USSR WERE UTILIZED AT THIS POINT, AND IF THE U.S. WOULD ADOPT A POLICY OF HELPING TO HEAL THE WOUNDS BY PARTICIPATING IN THE POSTWAR RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE AREA.

4. STEVENS HAD NOT YET FILED A STORY OF THIS AND IS NOT CERTAIN THAT HE WILL.

5. COMMENT: WE VIEW THIS APPROACH AS A SOVIET ATTEMPT TO PUT A RESPECTABLE FACE ON A SITUATION WHICH THEY SEE COULD REDOUND TO THEIR DISADVANTAGE IN THEIR RELATIONS WITH U.S. THEY PRESUMABLY WISH TO MINIMIZE THE POSSIBLE DAMAGE WHILE SHARING SOME OF THE CREDIT FOR THE SUCCESSES OF THE "LEBERATION" FORCES. WE ASSUME THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD INDEED HAVE PREFERRED A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT TO A MILITARY ONE (MOSCOW 5446 AND PREVIOUS), BUT THEY CLEARLY DID LITTLE OR NOTHING
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TO PREVENT HANOI'S PUSH AND HAVE PROMOTED HANOI'S LINE ALL DURING THE CURRENT OFFENSIVE. THE COMMENT ABOUT LIMITING AID TO THE DRV SEEMS DUBIOUS AND THE ONE ABOUT MAINTAINING TIES TILL THE END WITH THE LON NOL REGIME IS LAUGHABLE.

6. THE CALL FOR THE U.S. TO ACCEPT THE OUTCOME IN INDOCHINA WITH MINIMAL ILLWILL AND TO USE MOSCOW'S

"GOOD OFFICES" IN PATCHING THINGS UP WITH HANOI SERVES THREE APPARENT PURPOSES: FIRST, IT SEEKS TO DRAW OFF THE FIRE FROM THE SOVIETS AS BIG GAINERS IN THE OUTCOME. SECOND, IT SEEKS MUCH-NEEDED U.S. ASSISTANCE IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WAR-TORN INDOCHINA, THEREBY SHARING THE AID BURDEN. AND THIRD, IT APPEARS TO SEEK A ROLE FOR MOSCOW IN POST-WAR INDOCHINA WHICH WOULD NOT BE SOLELY DEFINED BY HANOI. ALL THREE POINTS ARE SELF-SERVING FROM MOSCOW'S STANDPOINT, BUT MAY INDICATE THAT MOSCOW MAY EXPECT THE FRUITS OF VICTORY TO HAVE A FEW PITS.

7. WHILE THIS APPROACH WAS LOW-KEY, WE WOULD EXPECT TO SEE MOSCOW TAKE A SIMILAR LINE IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMENTARY FOLLOWING THE DENOUEMENT IN SAIGON (THOUGH WITHOUT PUBLIC REFERENCE TO SOVIET GOOD OFFICES). IN PARTICULAR WE EXPECT THE SOVIETS TO STRESS POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION AS THE MAIN ORDER OF BUSINESS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE SOVIETS MAY SEEK A LARGER AND MORE VISIBLE ROLE IN POST-WAR INDOCHINA IN SUPPORT OF HANOI BUT SOMEWHAT INDEPENDENT FROM IT. THEY WILL ALSO STRESS, AS THEY HAVE IN RECENT REPORTING ON CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM, THE NORMALIZATION OF LIFE UNDER THE "LIBERATION" REGIMES, THE LACK OF REPRISALS (WHETHER TRUE OR NOT), AND THE NEED FOR OTHER COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY THE U.S., TO ACCEPT THE OUTCOME. THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF MOSCOW'S "GOOD OFFICES" MAY BE TO ENCOURAGE THE U.S. TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON AID OFFERS MADE AT THE TIME OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT.

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